



Fraudulent Sales Pitches Targeting Satellite Television Customers

Minority groups and seniors targeted in scams

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MADISON – Satellite television customers statewide are being targeted by scammers promising increased channel options or decreased bills in exchange for a one-time annual payment. The scammers appear to target Latinos and minority populations, seniors, and consumers that regularly use cash for transactions.

“Consumers are calling us to report that they’ve been contacted by criminals falsely claiming to represent a satellite television provider,” said Sandy Chalmers, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “These are fairly elaborate schemes, and it takes many victims time to catch on that they have been scammed. By the time they find out, their money is gone and their actual satellite bill is past due.”

Consumer Protection is asking all cable and satellite television customers to be on the alert for fraudulent sales calls. Remember:

- Unless you have initiated the contact, be careful not to give out personal or account information over the phone (especially your account, account pin, social security or credit card numbers) to someone who claims to be a satellite television representative.
- If you receive a call that sounds like it may be a scam, hang up and call your cable or satellite provider directly to verify and report the situation.
 - DISH Network asks customers to report these fraudulent sales calls to their consumer fraud department. You can reach a DISH Network consumer fraud investigator at 888-309-0370 from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. daily.
 - DIRECTV customers can report fraudulent sales calls to the company at signalintegrity@directv.com or through their hotline: 310-964-2020.
- Be suspicious of any service request that requires a wire transfer or the purchase of a prepaid debit card.
- If you wish to make changes to your existing account or channel package, contact your cable or satellite provider through the telephone number listed on your bill.
- If you have fallen for a scam and have sent money on a prepaid debit card or through a wire transfer, file a police report. One Wisconsin consumer was able to get his money back after being scammed – because he filed a police report, authorities were able to work with Western Union to gather information on the recipient of his money transfer.

The scams targeting satellite television customers typically involve one of the following scenarios:

Scenario #1

A scammer contacts a satellite television subscriber claiming to be a representative of the satellite company. The scammer will request a number of account-specific details, and will make a pitch to the victim that they can offer increased channel options and a year’s worth of service for a discounted one-time fee (often around \$250-\$400).

While Scammer #1 is on the phone with the victim, a second scammer calls the satellite company to upgrade the victim’s services using the personal information Scammer #1 received. This prompts a service request for the satellite company to send out a technician for an install of the upgraded

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service. Meanwhile, the victim is instructed to send a Green Dot “MoneyPak” prepaid debit card to a third-party address to pay for the year’s commitment.

Since the receiver of the money is a scammer with no actual affiliation with the satellite company, the victim will start receiving notices from the company that their account is past due.

Because the victim has received an upgraded package, he would have little indication that he has been scammed and that his account with the satellite company is not paid. If the victim refuses to pay the actual bills (believing that he has already paid for a year’s services), a satellite provider could also add on an early termination fee for the cancellation in addition to late payments and equipment fees.

Scenario #2

A scammer contacts a satellite television subscriber offering her an upgrade promotion. The victim is told that around \$300 would be deposited into her subscriber account, and the victim is asked to set up a money transfer through Western Union to a third-party company (“Company X” in this example) for the upgrade.

Following the transfer, the victim finds that the channels are never upgraded. The scammer has also misused Company X’s name, and the address the payment is sent to is not actually affiliated with Company X.

“It is important for cable and satellite television customers to use caution when dealing with sales requests where the sales person calls the customer,” added Chalmers. “Be cautious with your personal and account information, and remember to hang up and call your provider directly if you think the call may be a scam.”

For more information or to file a consumer complaint, visit Consumer Protection’s website at datcp.wisconsin.gov; via e-mail at datcphotline@wisconsin.gov or call toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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